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INFO RUCNCOM/EC CARICOM COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 1591
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0056
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [BB](#) [CU](#) [XL](#)
SUBJECT: BARBADOS REAFFIRMS FRIENDSHIP AND DIFFERENCES WITH
CUBA

Classified By: DCM Mary Ellen T. Gilroy for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On December 7-8, Barbados hosted the fourth meeting of the Barbados/Cuba Joint Commission to discuss opportunities for deepening the two countries' relations and exploring new areas for cooperation. The headline announcement from the meeting was Barbados' agreement to participate in Cuba's "Operacion Milagro," which offers free cataract surgeries to patients in partner countries. Barbados also requested Cuba's assistance in Cricket World Cup preparations. However, recent public statements by Barbadian Attorney General Dale Marshall demonstrate that Barbados, while it may be interested in receiving Cuba's assistance, is less interested in Cuba's socialist policies and system. End Summary.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE AND EDUCATION LINKS

¶2. (C) On December 7-8, Barbados hosted the fourth meeting of the Barbados/Cuba Joint Commission. The meeting was chaired by Teresa Marshall, Permanent Secretary in Barbados' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Roberto Rivas Lopez, Director of Latin America and Caribbean Division of Cuba's Ministry of Foreign Investment and Economic Cooperation. Marshall opened the meeting by "sending our most warm and fraternal greetings to the Government and people of Cuba, and in particular to President Fidel Castro." Beyond these atmospherics and pledges of mutual friendship, the meeting seemed to break little new ground. According to press headlines and Francois Jackman, the CARICOM desk officer at Barbados' Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the meeting's key deliverable was Barbados' agreement to participate in Cuba's free cataract care program "Operacion Milagro." Barbados spent over a year and a half reviewing the program after it was first offered. The Barbadian Minister of Health, Jerome Walcott, and Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Joy St. John, approved the program only after a visit to Cuba to inspect personally Cuba's medical facilities and standards. According to a news release by the Barbados Government Information Service, the agreement is still contingent on further discussions with Cuba, and Jackman said that they hope to finalize the agreement by March 2007. In light of the malaria outbreak on Jamaica, Barbados also asked for Cuba's assistance with assessing its malaria control program for wetlands.

¶3. (C) In addition, Barbadian officials sought to highlight the conclusion of an agreement on the recognition of degrees

earned by Barbadian students in Cuba. However, since educational links between the two countries are limited, the impact of this agreement will be negligible. Jackman acknowledged that very few Barbadian students are attracted to studying in Cuba, and vice versa, due to the language barrier. Press reported that some 67 Barbadian students are currently studying in Cuba, a figure that Jackman thought was accurate. According to Jackman, there were no Cuban students at the Cave Hill campus of the University of West Indies.

CRICKET WORLD CUP

14. (C) Barbadian press also reported that the government requested assistance from Cuba in their preparations for the 2007 Cricket World Cup (CWC). Jackman told PolOff that the two governments did not discuss any specifics, and the CWC was just "thrown out as one area of potential cooperation." The press reported that the CWC assistance from Cuba would likely be in the area of emergency response, and Jackman confirmed that the CWC came up during the governments' discussion of Cuba's severe burn unit, which Barbados lacks at the local Queen Elizabeth Hospital. According to Jackman, there is definitely a need for further discussion with Cuba on this issue, but he said that no meetings have been scheduled yet.

ASSISTANCE TO CUBA

15. (C) On the face of it, Cuba seemed to get very little in return for its generosity. Barbadian press was largely silent on the topic of Barbados' assistance to Cuba, and Jackman could offer only slightly more information. He said

that Barbados committed to provide assistance with some of Cuba's sports programs, namely cricket and road tennis. He added that Barbados was also considering providing English language training, but at this point, no specific courses or programs have been organized. However, as is usually the case with Cuban assistance, no tangible reciprocation was probably necessary or expected. Barbados and other countries in the Eastern Caribbean have been consistent allies of the Cuban government, demonstrating their support through votes and public statements in the United Nations and other fora.

WE ARE NOT CUBA

16. (C) However, Barbados's support for and friendship with Cuba apparently has its limits. In a public interview published in December, Barbados' Attorney General Dale Marshall argued strongly against the possibility of Barbados turning to socialism in the future, despite recent leftist trends in the hemisphere. Marshall essentially relegated Cuban-style socialism to Barbados' dustbin of history when he said: "Barbados was caught up in that (socialism) 30 to 40 years ago, when that was a pervasive theme not just in our political arena but also in academia... I think we have gone past that, and we have tried to find a path that works for us and for Barbadians."

COMMENT

17. (C) It is encouraging that Barbadian officials are realistic enough to see Cuba for what it is, rather than some romanticized socialist paradise. This recognition, however, will mean little in practice, at least in the near term. Barbados is likely to continue welcoming--even if cautiously--Cuba's assistance and supporting Cuba with words and votes, if for no other reason than small island nation solidarity. In Barbados' case, that solidarity probably weighs more heavily in guiding Barbadian foreign policy than Cuba's offers of help. In this regard, Barbados is different from its smaller Eastern Caribbean neighbors, in that it is less likely to be directly swayed by dollar diplomacy. For example, Barbados spurned Venezuela's Petrocaribe offer, and

it chose to build its cricket stadium for the CWC with its own resources. No doubt, Barbados' relatively strong economic record and advanced level of development translate into greater flexibility when it comes to offers of assistance. However, Barbados has not used this flexibility to strike out on its own in terms of foreign policy. While Cuba, Venezuela, China and others may have less direct influence over Barbados, Barbados will inevitably be bound to its neighbors' policies because of their shared commitment to the CARICOM consensus, principle of noninterference, and small nation solidarity, as well as a certain degree of anti-Americanism.

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